

Turning Research into Classroom Practice: AKA “So What!?”

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Turning Research into Classroom Practice: AKA “So What!?” is a bridge to disseminate research into the classroom. A research informed instructor is an up-to-date instructor! In this feature, an article from the Fashion discipline of Family and Consumer Sciences is examined. A quick review of the article is followed by real and practical applications that can be incorporated into the classroom.

Article citation:

Tiggemann, M., Polivy, J, and Hargreaves, D. (2009). [The processing of thin ideals in fashion magazines: A source of social comparison or fantasy?](#) *Journal of Social and Cultural Psychology*, 28(1), 73-93.

Quick review of the article:

This article tackles an interesting topic in the field of fashion, fashion magazines and the ideal of body thinness. How women view images in magazines was the point of study for these researchers; built on the premise that women have a well-documented history of body dissatisfaction. In fact, much of this topic has been discussed in relation to disordered eating, and in some cases, how it is correlated to mass media. Sadly, fashion magazine imagery has been viewed as a primary source of body dissatisfaction and feelings of inadequacy due to not meeting the proposed thin ideal.

The authors discuss the link between exposure to fashion magazines and body dissatisfaction. Ample research has proven that this link exists. However, there are also positive outcomes that may occur by women viewing fashion magazines. Research has shown that women and girls continue to buy these magazines because they find them enjoyable and the magazines provide ideas and goals. Moreover, the magazines encourage inspiration and fantasy for the women who buy them, such that they can envision themselves in the roles of the women in the pictures; thinner and more attractive. Of course, these two “effects” may counteract each other, and therefore, it is important to investigate further.

This study sought to explain the process by which women respond to thin ideals in media. Authors tout that the study may be the first to intentionally provoke both negative and positive outcomes. That is, women engaging in social comparison and fantasy. To accomplish this, authors recruited 144 undergraduate students at a South Australian University. They designed a study to look at both a thin ideal in models, and ads focusing on products. They also controlled for how the women processed the ads,

by providing a control, a social comparison scenario, and a fantasy scenario. They did this by creating packets of 15 magazine ads – one set for each scenario mentioned above. They then asked students (randomly assigned to groups) to agree or disagree with a series of statements, based on the packet of materials they viewed. Some statements were specific to the scenario, and some statements were the same across all three scenarios. They also asked participants about their media consumption, mood and body satisfaction, self-esteem, and self-reported processing.

Descriptive and statistical analyses revealed the mean age as 21, BMI average was 23.7 (normal weight), and magazine consumption was, on average, 2 hours in the previous month. ANCOVA results found that the social comparison scenario (comparing yourself to the ideal in the magazine) produced a lower positive mood score than did the control and fantasy scenarios. Furthermore, women focusing on the thin ideal, had a greater negative mood than those focusing on the product. And, not surprisingly, the thin ideal scenario produced more body dissatisfaction than the product condition. Fantasy led to improved positive mood. Surprisingly, self-esteem was not significant in any condition or scenario.

Based on these results, researchers posited it was possible to have both positive and negative outcomes from mass media processing. These findings are important in framing mass media for young girls. Focusing on the positive aspects of processing might help young girls avoid body dissatisfaction and increase their positive mood.

Practice or “So What! ?”... how can I apply this in my classroom?:

Students and faculty in the Fashion discipline can benefit from information presented in this article. Body image is an important part of development, especially for young girls. Mass media has a huge role to play in this arena and more can be done to encourage healthy body image. The following are activities for students to consider the impact of mass media on body image:

- a) Have students review several fashion magazines. Which ones are good in terms of having a variety of models and body types? Which ones seem to focus only on very thin models?
- b) Ask students to discuss the desired target audience for different magazines. How do they feel the magazine is appealing to this target audience?
- c) Have male and female students compare and contrast their views of the models used in the advertising. What are similarities and differences? Are the views congruent?
- d) Do students feel the positive influence of magazines can outweigh the negative effects? Does fantasy play a big role in body satisfaction?
- e) Can fashion magazines serve as motivators for improving one's self-esteem and perceived body image?
- f) Ask students to count the number of ultra-thin models in magazines. Are there some magazines that seem to have more than others?

- g) Have students research a “healthy” magazine, one in which “normal” body sized women are used in the ads. Can they find one? Do they exist? What is the goal of this magazine?
- h) Discuss, as a class or in small groups, ways to encourage young girls to have self confidence about their body. What are some creative solutions that were discussed?
- i) Besides magazines, what other mass media outlets are showing ultra- thin women? Are they different or the same as magazines? Do students think the effect is the same or greater?
- j) Have students write a public service announcement aimed at positive role modeling and female body image. What types of things would they focus on?
- k) Ask students to work in small groups and discuss their feelings from the past about fashion magazines. Do they feel they are fantasy? Or do they feel they promote dissatisfaction and social comparison?
- l) Have students make a poster of positive body images they can find in advertising. What are the products being sold? Do they seem effective?
- m) Ask a psychologist specializing in eating disorders to talk to the class about eating disorders and triggers for the disease. Have them discuss mass media and body image.
- n) Have students calculate BMI (body mass index) and guess what the BMI is on the models in the ads. Is their BMI in the healthy range?
- o) Ask students to design a study like the one discussed here. How would they measure the effect of fashion magazines on women in general?